Communication is basic to a relationship

What is communication?

www.lrhartley.com/communication

The word means "to make common." It is the process of interacting, of creating and negotiating meanings. Your feelings, communication style, family of origin, gender, and culture all affect your communication.

Poor communication can lead to problems, including conflict. Conflict itself, however, is not a problem—depending on how you handle it. All couples argue and disagree at times. If you can learn to "fight fairly," your chances of staying together are high. When you are in conflict with your partner, ask yourself: "What can we learn from this? How can we grow from this situation?"

The Process of Communicating can be More Important than the Actual Message.

How we communicate affects what we communicate.

According to some research, couples who describe themselves as "happy" do the following more often than couples who describe themselves as "unhappy":

- Talk with each other
- Discuss personal topics
- Avoid dwelling on topics of conflict
- Paraphrase each other
- Are sensitive to each other's feelings
- Keep communication channels open
- Use nonverbal communication

Characteristics of Enduring Relationships

Learning to accept and tolerate differences and weaknesses in relationships is important. Research studies have identified five important characteristics of enduring relationships:

- Intimacy
- Commitment
- Communication
- Congruence (shared perceptions of how the relationship is going and shared expectations of the relationship)
- World view (religious/spiritual orientation)

Persevere in your relationship. When things are hard, enduring couples are optimistic that things will improve.

Positive Support: Building Self-Esteem

Valuing yourself and others is important. It involves sharing, appreciating, being affectionate, and providing a sense of belonging.

Expressing appreciation:

Steps in the appreciation cycle include:

- Identifying
- Expressing
- Receiving

Learn to see the positive in the other.

Express I-statements such as: "I appreciate . . . I especially enjoy . . . I love you because. . ."

It's also important to receive appreciation graciously, rather than to brush it off. Tell your partner you feel good that he or she noticed. When you feel appreciated, you feel better about yourself. Just like children, our self-worth rises when we receive positive strokes.

On the other hand, when we are put down, it can take a lot of positive strokes to make up the hurt.

Steps to Use in Communicating

- Recognize when an issue needs to be discussed—deal with the issue when it arises, rather than letting it build up and then explode
- Set a time that is mutually acceptable and without distractions
- Use good communication skills—listen carefully, and take turns speaking and listening
- Respect each other; be courteous
- Define the topic, issue, or problem specifically; stick to one issue
- Speak for yourself only; share feelings; identify how you think your behaviour contributes to the problem
- Realize that happiness is inside a person, rather than something someone else provides for you
- Don't take your partner for granted
- Take a timeout, if necessary

Just sharing and listening may take care of the issue. If not, you may need to problem solve:

- Identify alternative solutions
- Focus
- Compromise
- Negotiate solutions
- Implement a solution

Later:

- Evaluate the solution
- Think of another solution, if necessary